The Life You Save May Be Your Own

Flannery O’Connor

Lexie Jones and Rachel Holland

*The Life You Save May Be Your Own* is a story about two people who will go to any extreme to get what they want. The **protagonist**, Mrs. Lucynell Crater lives on a small farmhouse with her daughter also named Lucynell Crater. The daughter is thirty-two years old, deaf, and mute. With these conditions, the mother has a hard time finding a husband for her daughter. One evening while sitting on the front porch, Mrs. Lucynell looks up to see a man walking towards her house. She notices that he has an unfamiliar face, which is strange because living in such a small town has allowed her to meet and converse with almost everyone. She isn’t concerned because he looks like a “tramp” that nobody should be afraid of. As he approached the house the mother stands with her hand on her hip. The daughter, who was playing in the yard, jumped up and down and pointed with excitement. The man makes a cross looking figure in the sky toward the evening sun, revealing only half an arm on one side. He says he would give a fortune to see a sun set this way every day. The man introduces himself as Mr. Shiftlet **(the antagonist)** and as the conversation continues he spots an automobile which he wishes to have. Mr. Shiftlet asks if her daughter is her baby girl and she replies yes and she wouldn’t give her up for anything in the world. He tells Mrs. Lucynell to never let any man take her daughter away from her and she says if any man were to come after her daughter she would have to stay around the place He eventually agrees to work on the farm in exchange for a place to sleep (automobile) and food. Within a week, it was evident the work Mr. Shiftlet was doing around the farm. Every evening he and Mrs. Lucynell and Lucynell would sit on the porch and he would talk. One day while working on the car, Mr. Shiftlet teaches Lucynell how to say bird. When the mother saw how he worked with her she was eager to make him her son-in-law. She lies and tells him her daughter is fifteen or sixteen years old and then goes on to say how she would never give him any trouble just like he would wish. Then she requests they go into town and get marries but he refuses the offer saying it takes money to get married and he doesn’t have much. Mrs. Lucynell says she will give him the money, but he refuses again saying if he were to marry a woman he would want to be able to take her to a nice hotel and give her a good meal. Mrs. Lucynell agrees to give him 15 dollars for a weekend trip but he assures her this won’t be enough and she then offers 17.50. He agrees and that Saturday the three of them drove to town and Lucynell and Mr. Shiftlet got married. The mother tells the daughter goodbye and tells Mr. Shiftlett to take good care of her daughter. They drive off on their honeymoon in the car that he had fixed up. As he is driving he feels a sense on contentment spoiled by the presence of Lucynell who is now asleep. While she is sleeping he decides to abandoned her about a hundred miles from the farm in a diner telling the workers to make sure she has a hot meal and that she is only a hitch hiker. He continues on his journey in the car and starts to feel guilty, so he picks up a hitchhiker on the side of the road. He rambles on to the hitchhiker about how he shouldn’t have ran away and left his mother. Mr. Shiftlet says leaving his mother was the worst decision he ever made. Eventually the hitchhiker gets tired of listening to him and jumps out of the car. Mr. Shiftlet continues on to Mobile.

A Good Man is Hard to Find and The Life You Save May Be Your Own surprisingly relate to each other in many ways. The grandmother in A Good Man is Hard To Find and the Mother in The Life You Save May Be Your Own are alike, but in different ways. They are both traditional. The grandmother considered herself to be a Christian lady and based her morals and appearance upon being the ideal lady of her time. Mrs. Lucynell lives in a small farmhouse and her first priority is to get her daughter married off, which is typical of her time. While they are quite different, both women have values based on tradition. Also in both stories the two women are the **protagonists**. Although Mrs. Lucynell was just a mother, her daughter was thirty-two years old, so she had to be at least in her late forties. With this being said, both women are older. Both women are also in a sense self absorbed. The grandmother is all about her appearance and even though she cared about the others, only truly tried to save herself in the end. The mother was the same way. Even though she cared about her daughter, she was lonely at her house with nobody to talk to, and all she wanted was to get her married off and would do anything for that to happen. Another connection between the two stories is they both have an **antagonist** and it is a man. Although the Misfit was obviously worse than Mr. Shiftlet, they both did things that hurt other people. The Misfit killed the whole family and Mr. Shiftlet not only left his deaf and mute wife on her own in the middle of nowhere, but left Mrs. Lucynell with no sign of where they were going or when they would be back. Her daughter was her pride and joy, so she would be worrying herself to death and be left with no way to go find her daughter because Mr. Shiftlet took the car with him. In both stories, the bad guys were destructive. The two stories have surprise endings that leave you hanging and wondering why what happened happened, but the endings force you to find the deeper meanings of why they happened the way they did. The Misfit didn’t just kill the whole family and the grandmother because he wanted to, because he informed the grandmother that he would never like to kill a lady, so you are left to assume that there is a deeper meaning to the killings that took place. Mr. Shiftlet seemed like a good man in the beginning and then goes in the opposite direction in the end. Reading through the story, you may bypass all the little details that may reveal that he is actually a greedy man and only looking for what he wants, but if you look deeper for a meaning that revealed why he left the daughter stranded and kept on going with the car and money, his greediness is apparent.



This picture represents the traditional **theme** set by the leading women characters in “A Good Man Is Hard to Find” and “The Life You Save May Be Your Own”. In “A Good Man Is Hard to Find”, the grandma consistently refers to herself as a “lady” and wears a dress and a hat. She believes that being a lady is the most important aspect in her life. Even when the Misfit killed her family, the grandma still believed that she might come out alive. She thought that the Misfit would never dare to kill a “lady”, but then soon realized she was terribly wrong.

In the short story, “The Life You Save May Be Your Own”, the mother, Mrs. Lucynell Crater, spots an opportunity to marry off her daughter when a man by the name of Tom T. Shiftlet walks up to her farmhouse. The mother can’t help but feel lonely at her farmhouse, with just her deaf, mute daughter for company. She basically bribes Mr. Shiftlet to marry her daughter and even lies about the daughter’s age. The daughter and Mr.Shiftlet eventually do get married, but the couple didn’t last long. He was happy with his life and his beloved car, but not thrilled about the fact that he was married to her. Mr. Shiftlet abandons his wife at a diner about a hundred miles away from the farm.

Both traditional themes set by the main women characters in the **short stories dénouement** ended up burdening them and their families at the end of the stories.